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Nuggets from Intelligence History

During the U.S. Civil War, Confederate President Jefferson Davis created an economic intelligence operation in the covert action mode and served as its first and only case officer throughout its existence.

Economic intelligence usually lacks the intrigue of political intelligence and normally lacks the immediate significance of military intelligence. But economic intelligence can and often does exert a longer-range influence that bends political and military intelligence to its will.

The Civil War period is replete with tales of the high risks and dangers involved in the Abolitionists' underground railroads, which conveyed escaped slaves to freedom in the North. But Jefferson Davis recognized the need for a different type of underground – one dedicated not to the movement of refugees but to the movement of individuals who sought the survival of the Confederacy through becoming involved in a highly discreet cotton and munitions cartel.

Although large sums of money were involved in Davis's cotton network and the participants were rather casually assembled from various walks of life, it was never betrayed or penetrated. The lack of betrayal and penetration can be attributed to good luck, to observing good tradecraft, and/or to exercising uncanny intuition in selecting ideologically motivated participants who were competent as well as loyal.

Before Jefferson Davis set up the Confederate underground cotton network, some of the southern states set up their own cotton deals independent of the central government; the Confederate Army did some; and the Confederate Navy did others.

The Confederate States of America had a critical need for money to buy arms, ammunition, and the other accoutrements of war available in Europe

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(and sometimes the North). Enormous profits were derived by the entrepreneurial cotton speculators and traders who had connections with or functioned as commercial blockade runners. The huge profits, however, did not go into armaments for the Confederacy but were either banked in Europe or were used to buy luxury items for import into the Confederate States for resale.

From correspondence with friends in the North, President Davis was aware of a growing demand for cotton by manufacturers in the Northern States, not just abroad. In exchange for bonds and in payment of taxes, the Confederacy was in possession of millions of dollars worth of cotton. It was time for the government to enter the lucrative cotton trade with a greater potential for revenue and reduced costs in arms purchases than might be expected if the government-owned cotton was channeled through contractors. Davis's correspondents also recognized that those who could fund such a venture stood to share millions.

Davis had only two options. With the backing of sympathetic Northern investors prepared to run the sea blockade, the Confederate government could enter the export trade with a greater claim on the profits. The government's credit would be improved and it could negotiate directly with weapons suppliers rather than through its agents abroad or profit-taking intermediaries. The land blockades, on the other hand, could be defeated only through a risky scheme involving corruption and political efforts by allies in Washington to convince President Lincoln, his cabinet, and his generals to have the cotton secured and fed into acceptable commercial channels whenever the Union Army moved into areas where the inventories were stored.[1] Both options carried considerable risk, but the immense profits to be made would assure the South the needed cash flow to continue the war. In exercising the first option (seeking loyal capital investors for running the sea blockades with government-owned cotton), Davis saw national purpose in establishing an underground railway to the North.[2]

Selected for the task was Col. Ralph Abercrombie, a native of Baltimore and commander of a Louisiana regiment in A. P. Hill's Corps. Davis and his wife, who had known Abercrombie since the officer was a child, were on intimate terms with his widowed mother and, as Secretary of War, Davis had appointed Abercrombie a lieutenant in the Regular Army. Before the Civil War, and during its early stages, he had served with the Union Army as a captain with the 13th Infantry. Convinced his duty lay with the South, Abercrombie resigned his commission and joined the Confederate Army.

Sometime in mid-1863, Davis summoned Abercrombie to Richmond and sought his agreement to open the secret route to the North. Davis suggested that it be by way of the Chesapeake Bay and Leonardstown, Maryland, but

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Abercrombie convinced him that a more feasible route for the underground railway would be between Great Falls, Virginia, and Cumberland, Maryland. He reminded Davis that he had attended St. James College near Hagerstown, Maryland and had "learned every foot of ground between that point and Washington." In approving the proposal, President Davis authorized "any amount of funds" necessary for its implementation.[3]

About six weeks later, Col. Abercrombie returned to Richmond with assurances the network was in place. He had recruited some twenty people – planters, farmers, doctors, merchants, day-laborers, and three black women – to serve as agents in an underground line extending the seventy miles between General Robert E. Lee's lines at the Rapidan River and Great Falls, some twelve miles above Washington. Some would serve as guides and lookouts, others would furnish horses or row boats across the Potomac River, and another group would operate places of concealment (today called "safe houses"). In all, five crossing points were established on the Potomac, and at each point lookouts and guides in the pay of the Confederacy stood in readiness.

Abercrombie explained that all the agents were in sympathy with the Confederacy and that nearly all had offered their services gratuitously when approached. Yet, his strategy was to bind each to even greater faithfulness by having members of the network accept pay from the Confederacy. President Davis approved, and asked Abercrombie to nominate an assistant to aid in managing the secret net. Abercrombie's choice was Col. Newton Killgore, age about 26, who was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army's Topographical Engineer Corps before the War. Killgore, then on detached service with the Confederate Army in Charleston, was summoned to Richmond.

The first service with which the new line was tasked by President Davis was the delivery of eleven letters to persons in the North and the opening of negotiations with them to implement Davis's plan. One of the letters was of particular importance. It was addressed to Major Hanson Weightman of Washington, a longtime intimate of Davis and a fellow Mississippian with whom Davis had served in the Mexican War. Weightman had gained a considerable reputation for his exploits in that conflict, had been wounded seriously and returned home where he married well. Subsequently, he resigned his commission in the Regular Army and moved to Washington in retirement. There he was on close terms with both President Lincoln and Secretary of State Seward and ostensibly "a strong Union man," yet all the time in correspondence with President Davis. Weightman gave Davis the names of other sympathizers. Davis had communicated privately with each of them and the letters at hand were a way of indicating both the official nature of the plan therein and that the courier was empowered personally by Davis to convey and discuss it.

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On reaching Washington, Abercrombie made contact with Maj. Weightman.[4] Both then went to meet another sympathizer, tavern-keeper Ben Beveridge, to contract for a suite of rooms at the Washington House, a hotel operated by Beveridge's mother.[5] The rooms, they instructed Beveridge, were to be kept vacant at all times for use by the network, and would be paid for by the Confederacy. As earnest money, Beveridge was handed an order for $2,000 in gold. The rooms secured, Abercrombie and Weightman proceeded to the Baltimore home of another addressee of a Davis letter, George Thomas. Thomas listened to the plan and agreed with it. The next evening he hosted a dinner at which Abercrombie and Weightman briefed other southern sympathizers and the participants agreed to take part in the venture.[6] From Baltimore, Weightman and Abercrombie moved on to Philadelphia to call on another addressee, Dr. Charles Howell. Following the pattern established in Baltimore, Dr. Howell invited a few trusted local sympathizers to a dinner at his home on Rittenhouse Square. Telegraphic invitation was also sent to Allen McLane, president of the Pacific Mail Steamship Co., New York, an important ingredient in the proposed venture.[7]

All the dinner guests agreed with the Davis plan but, before entering into it, deemed it best for one of McLane's men, James Waddell, and John Lamb, a New York broker, to accompany Col. Abercromie to Richmond to meet personally with President Davis and to examine the claimed stockpiles of cotton. As an interim measure, the group agreed to furnish Major Weightman with whatever funds Davis might need by depositing it to the credit of the Confederate States in the bank of Mr. George Riggs in Washington.[8]

Three days later, in early August 1863, Lamb and Waddell were in Washington, and shortly before midnight left Ben Beveridge's tavern on the first step of the journey, a visit to the home of Henry Thecker in Georgetown for disguises.[9] There, Lamb's long chin whiskers were shorn and his hair "nicked and chopped over, as if done with a pair of sheep-shears in the hands of a country bumpkin, instead of by a Broadway barber." Waddell's beard and hair received the same treatment, and false "mutton chop" side whiskers and a false moustache added. Clothing more suitable for ox-drivers was substituted for their elegant New York business suits.

About one o'clock in the morning, the group set off along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, with Ben Beveridge several hundred yards in advance and Abercrombie as rear guard. As Beveridge approached the canal lock where the first Union sentinel was stationed, he played the role of a drunkard and called out to the lock-keeper that he had plenty of whiskey and cigars. The lock-keeper was one of the network, and agreed quite loudly that the sentry might wish to share in Ben's providence. So did the guard, and while he engaged in boisterous conversation with Ben, the rest of the travellers slipped

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by quietly. A short walk along the canal tow-path brought Abercrombie and his two charges to the farm and lock-house of the widow Mary Ennis, another paid agent in the network. There, they mounted horses and led by Joseph Ennis, her son, took off at a brisk trot for the nine miles to Hendrickson's, a point just below Great Falls. While Joseph returned to his farm with the horses, the travellers proceeded on foot for about a mile until they reached the Great Falls Hotel,[10] also guarded by a Union sentry.

Entering a rear entrance, they were greeted by Mr. Morse,[11] who with his partner Garrett,[12] operated the combination store and hotel and were paid by the Confederacy. The two New Yorkers, already tired from the adventure – Lamb was about fifty and Waddell, though forty, was stout – retired for the night, while Abercrombie waited for Garrett to arrive. From Garrett he learned the line was open and in good working order and that guide number 1 would row them across the Potomac River the next night.

Word came that the guide failed to appear. The travellers spent a nervous twenty-four hours, and were relieved the next evening to hear he was on station. They slipped out the back door of the hotel, walked about a mile up the river, and were rowed across the Potomac. A walk of about a mile from the Virginia shore brought them to the next station, a Negro hut. Three miles more on foot brought them to the next, a farmhouse. Horses were waiting, and the thirty miles to the next station was a rambling tour by guide number 2 of pig-paths, dirt lanes, woods and farm fields. On arrival at the farm of the station-master, Dr. Carrico, another paid agent, the group hid and rested as daylight dawned. The following evening, a new guide appeared, guide 2 having taken the horses and retraced his steps home. They rode fresh horses about thirty-two miles to the next way-station, the farm and mill of Henry Budd, all the while avoiding major roadways and the danger of meeting sentinels or Union patrols.

While guide number 3 engaged the Budd's Mill sentry in lively conversation (explaining he was going to visit an uncle) and sips from the ever-present canteen full of whiskey, the travellers slipped by and waited in a nearby woods for the guide to rejoin them. From there it was about four miles to the next station, the home of Jonathan Brisco.

At Brisco's the travellers experienced the first major hitch in their itinerary. Since it was at the outer line of the Union defenses, not only was there a guard at the house, but others were on post at near-equal distances extending to the east and west. As before, the guide engaged the sentry in conversation (the "uncle" visit) and sips of barley-corn while the travellers slipped into the farmhouse, out its back door across the garden and meadow and into a group of pines beyond. The guard somehow saw the three, and seemed troubled that they had passed through his lines. The guide, still in

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conversation, soothed the sentry's concern with fifty dollars in gold, also assuring the guide would remain in his good graces in the future.

The journey from Brisco's was uneventful, followed by six miles on foot to the farm of Andrew Mitchell where they procured horses for the thirteen miles to the farm of Walter Randolph near China Grove Station, Virginia. Then, a morning train ride from China Grove to Orange Court House, and a casual breakfast at Freeman's Hotel before catching the afternoon train to Richmond and comfortable rooms at the Spottsylvania Hotel.

After meetings with President Davis and two or three weeks travel throughout the South to inspect the government's cotton stores, Lamb and Waddell returned to Richmond to advise Davis that the deal was set. There would be no difficulty in obtaining the war supplies in exchange for cotton. Abercrombie was waiting, and the underground railway returned them to the North without incident.

The venture met all of President Davis's expectations. The cotton ring chartered ships to pick up the cotton, and except for three that were seized by the Union blockade, the transport of the cotton to northern and foreign ports continued until the fall of Fort Fisher on 15 January 1865. In the case of the three captured ships, Davis reimbursed the cotton ring with cotton equal to the costs of the ships and cargo. How much the individual cotton ring investors made on the venture is not known; one small investor is reported to have made "a million of money," which suggests a far larger gain for the major investors.[13]

Other known travellers on Jeff Davis's underground railway included Charles R. Dangerfield, the English arms manufacturer and merchant, and Francis Willis, a British manufacturer of saddles, clothing and accouterments. Both concluded successful contracts with the Confederacy but it was with another prominent Englishman that the network ran its greatest risk of exposure, yet emerged unblemished. The visitor was Lord John Brewerton, representing both that government's Ministry and the industrial sector.

When Lord Brewerton arrived in New York from England in September 1863, he proceeded directly to the 88 Wall Street offices at the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. for meetings with Allen McLane, president of the company and a member of the cotton ring. From there he moved on to Baltimore, joined by C. C. Pollard, a Philadelphia member of the group, for a meeting with participants in that city. The meetings concluded, Lord Brewerton and Col. Abercrombie proceeded to Washington for sessions with Major Weightman at Beveridge's Tavern, and then to the British Embassy. There Brewerton briefed Lord Lyons, the British Minister, on the successful outcome of the meetings and of the contemplated journey to Richmond. Lord Brewerton retired for the evening, a guest of the Ambassador, while Abercrombie

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– despite the sensitivity of his mission and risk of apprehension – spent the night at the Capitol Hill home of his sister.[14]

Late the next day, Abercrombie picked up Lord Brewerton at the British Embassy and drove him to Thecker's in Georgetown for the disguise transformation of an English Lord into a crude farmer. The route to the Great Falls Hotel was without incident, and two hours later they walked two miles upstream to meet the boat that would carry them to the Virginia shore. The crossing was undetected and shortly thereafter they were safely in the hut of "Old Aunt Rachel," where they were concealed until the next night. Aunt Rachel's hut was probably the first such in the nation to provide such humble accommodations to an English Lord; Lord Brewerton tipped her $40 in gold for the privilege.

The next night it was a four-mile walk to Francis Lattimer's for horses. But there were no horses! The only mode of transport was a two-wheel dirt cart driven by a black, "Uncle Jarrett," and led by an old, blind mule. At first, as befitting his station, Lord Brewerton attempted to sit on a wood stool precariously balanced on the back of the cart and steadied by Abercrombie. When that proved far too bumpy, Brewerton threw away the stool and joined Abercrombie on a bed of straw. When they reached Wilson's Mill, the next station, Lord Brewerton thanked "Uncle Jarrett" with a tip of $100 in gold pieces, and gladly mounted a horse for the next eight miles. Then it was five miles afoot to the farm of Joseph Berry where the travellers remained concealed during daylight hours. At dark, fresh horses were mounted for the ride to Frederick Hutching's farm where new mounts were acquired for the six miles to Nathan Allen's place. Another change of horses and a six-mile ride brought them to Budd's Mill and a daylight nap. At nightfall it was time for another four miles on foot, this time to Brisco's, to obtain horses to carry them to the home of Dr. Charles Worthington. At Worthington's, a cooperative Union sentry extracted a $100 bribe in gold for allowing them to pass. Another short walk and they were on horseback once again for the nineteen-mile ride to Randolph's at China Grove Station.

After the daylight train ride to Richmond, Lord Brewerton was safely in rooms at the Ballard House and the next day moved into President Davis's Executive Mansion for additional meetings. All the secretiveness of his journey was laid aside and a reception ball held in his honor, complete with military bands, grand illumination, and fireworks. The formalities accomplished, Lord Brewerton set forth on a two-week inspection of the government's cotton stores. On his return, Brewerton assured Davis that whatever money, arms and provisions the Confederacy might need would be furnished promptly by Brewerton and his associates in exchange for the cotton. He also conveyed assurance that if the Ministry in England, which recognized

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that its material interests rested with the South, could have the least excuse for interference between the North and the South, it would be more than glad to espouse the cause of the latter. In all cases, Brewerton said, the Confederate States would continue to receive Britain's sympathy.

It took about a week to complete his affairs in Richmond, and once again Lord Brewerton was aboard Davis's underground railway to the North, ably guided by Col. Abercrombie. A week later he was in residence at the British Embassy accepting (as an ostensible supporter of the Union) an invitation to attend a grand ball at the White House and arranging (under his true colors) a meeting with the cotton ring in Philadelphia.

The operation of the underground railway was not without incidents of foolish bravado. As an example, Abercrombie accepted the invitation of Lord Brewerton to accompany the nobleman to the grand ball at the White House, and in the disguise of the "French exquisite" spent the evening rubbing shoulders with the leadership of the Union in its seat of power.

On another occasion he learned that Senator Andrew Johnson had a room in Beveridge's Washington House. Abercrombie's mother and Mrs. Johnson had been close friends, and the Senator knew him personally. Adopting a disguise, and with Ben Beveridge listening to the prank from the hallway, Abercrombie knocked and was admitted to the room. He thoroughly confused Johnson by speaking of friends and personal events before pulling off his false whiskers accompanied by a hearty laugh. He was recognized immediately. When asked to explain his conduct, Abercrombie volunteered the whole story of what he was doing in Washington.

Senator Johnson was aghast and quickly pulled down the shades. Hearing laughter from the hallway, Johnson discovered Ben and ordered him to enter the room, where Johnson made it plain that their practical joke had backfired. The Senator explained the awkward situation in which they had placed him and the severe compromise that would result if the visit became known. He extracted a promise from both men never to speak of the incident. Perhaps because he knew both men from childhood and was a longtime friend of their mothers, Senator Johnson did not turn them in; he continued to reside at Washington House, even though he knew it to be a nest of the enemy.

In another incident, Col. Killgore – on a mission to deliver a purchase order for weapons – found himself in the public rooms of the Fountain House, Baltimore, when his false moustache slipped. Unconsciously, he stepped to a mirror to adjust it. It was then he saw another patron watching him and quickly left the hotel for Barnum's. The man followed and Killgore was certain that he had been spotted by one of Lafayette Baker's War Department detectives. His fears were alleviated when the man called out Killgore's first name. Pleasantly, it was an old army friend, a southerner

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who approved of Killgore's mission, and one whose only purpose was to join Killgore in drinking to each other's health.

On one journey, Abercrombie was accosted on the Virginia shore above Great Falls by an unidentified man, to whom he gave his usual cover story. Believing it to be accepted, Abercrombie started to leave, only to be challenged as a spy. Abercrombie turned and shot the man dead. Later press reports identified the victim as a Captain in the Union's National Detective Police. On another trip Abercrombie was captured by two incorruptible Union sentinels about half-way between Great Falls and Georgetown. He was taken before their Captain, who happened to be eating at the time. The officer invited the "country bumpkin," Abercrombie, to join him at the table and explain himself. He did so, only to be betrayed by his "society manners" in handling a knife and fork,[15] guaranteeing his transfer to the 11th Pennsylvania Regiment guard house. The following day he was sent to Gen. Wilson's headquarters, probably for interrogation. When no one seemed interested in talking to the prisoner, Abercrombie was returned to the guard house. Once back in his cell, Abercrombie drank from a bottle he had concealed from his captors and became violently ill with diarrhea. He was transferred immediately to Lincoln Hospital in Georgetown. Fortunately, in the next bed was another prisoner, Capt. Lawrence Norton of Georgia. Norton's wife, who attended him daily, smuggled in a small watch spring file, which Norton used to shear the ball and chain that hobbled Abercrombie's movements. At first opportunity Abercrombie stole a pass and two bottles and rushed out of the hospital explaining to the sentry that he was on an emergency to get medicine for one of the doctors.

Abercrombie made it to Beveridge's Tavern. Recognizing that an alert must have been issued and that the Washington railway station would be watched, Beveridge took him by horse to Bladensburg Station, just outside the city, where Abercrombie boarded a train for Baltimore. He got off the train at the Relay House just outside that city and hired a hackney to take him the final thirteen miles. In Baltimore, he was concealed in the Fountain Hotel by members of the cotton ring, then sent on to Philadelphia to hide another two weeks at Dr. Howell's home until he felt it safe to make the return journey to Richmond. Meanwhile, the Washington papers were full of stories of the "wonderful escape of a rebel spy" while Lafayette Baker mobilized his detectives and police in eastern cities in a futile search.

The end of the war brought an end to the Confederacy and Jeff Davis's underground railway. Most of the agents disappeared into the mists of history. Garrett and Maus continued business operations on the canal and shared the financial benefits of its peak shipping years. By 1870, Maus (Morse) was Superintendent in Charge, Georgetown Division, of the C&O Canal Company. The members of the cotton ring returned to business as

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usual, albeit much richer. Col. Killgore returned to Charleston, studied law and was admitted to practice.

Abercrombie, still the adventurer, went by steamship from New York to Galveston and explored Texas by horseback, finishing off with a six-month sojourn in Mexico. Within two years of becoming President, Andrew Johnson appointed Abercrombie as one of three commissioners to reopen and establish U.S. mail routes throughout the former Confederate States.

REFERENCES

[1] The potential for such immense corruption was not beyond the realm of possibility. Kettell notes: "The diplomatic corps abroad and the incumbents of office at the North were most of them inclined to thwart the action of the new administration [of Abraham Lincoln], and in their train was a large number of active men on whom the government could not depend, if it found no opposition to encounter. The new administration found itself completely in the power of the secession party, and all its secrets, from the cabinet debates to the details of orders, were known in the South. The business of the departments, the judiciary, the army and navy, and the offices were filled with persons who were eagerly watching to catch up and transmit every item of information that might aid the Confederacy, or thwart the government." (Kettell, Thomas Prentice, 1862, *History of the Great Rebellion*. New York: N. C. Miller.)

[2] For details of other Confederate activities to enlist European support and to run the Union blockades, see Bulloch, James Dunwoody, 1959, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe*, New York: Thomas Yoseleff. Bulloch, a former U.S. Navy officer, served as the Confederacy's naval agent in Europe during the war and engaged in the cotton business in England from the end of the war until his death in 1901. Later more objective studies are Samuel Bernard Thompson's *Confederate Purchasing Operations Abroad*, (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973; reprint of 1935 edition, and Richard I. Lester's *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975. Lester's work also describes the operations of Federal agents to thwart the Confederate efforts in Europe. The timing of President Davis's initiation of the operation is significant. It came at a time he was being counseled that the government gain exclusive control of cotton export. As the narrative unfolds, it is evident that through his direct negotiation with the shippers, the purchasers and the arms merchants, President Davis clearly intends that the government-owned cotton be sold, and the military goods purchased, through the Executive Mansion.

During the early years of the war, exports of cotton had been the enterprise of private contractors rife with confusion and often an embarrassment to that government. The situation became so acute that in the Spring of 1863, Confederate purchasing agents complained to Richmond that the private ventures were disrupting the work of official agents abroad. One of them, Henry Hotze, objected, "It is undeniable that the credit of the Government has suffered most seriously by the clashing interests, the rivalries, and hostilities, sometimes the disgraceful public squabbles of contractors..." He urged that the government assume a strict monopoly in blockade running and prohibit the exportation of cotton except on Government account or in redemption of government bonds sold earlier in the war. He felt that if these resources were brought under control, the South would occupy "a financial position in Europe which would extend recognition sooner than the most powerful arguments of the pen or even the sword."

Another agent, C. J. McRae, protested that the contractors, often without credit or capital, were "hawking their contracts through the London, Manchester, and Liverpool markets and sell them to or divide them with the highest bidder. Such exhibitions are very damaging to our credit, as they create the impression among capitalists and all prudent men that a government which is so reckless of its means is not likely to achieve its independence against such fearful odds." He urged that the Confederacy "take the exports and imports into its own hands, and no cotton, tobacco or naval stores should be allowed to leave the country except on Government account or for the account of holders of produce bonds," and that the Confederate government purchase or take possession of all the cotton and tobacco in the country at a fixed price.

The concept of the Confederate government assuming a monopoly of the export trade and restoring its credit in Europe was heartening to President Davis and his advisors. Legislation was introduced,

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and on February 6, 1864, President Davis signed into law a ban on the exportation of cotton, tobacco, military and naval stores, sugar and rice from the Confederate States, except as the President should regulate, and authorized the government to engage in the export of those commodities. As President Davis explained later, until passage of the law, the foreign commerce of the Confederate States "was almost exclusively in the hands of aliens, that our cotton, tobacco, and naval stores were being drained from the States...and that the whole course of the trade had a direct tendency to impoverish our country, demoralize our people, depreciate our currency and enfeeble our defense."

The Confederate Congress appropriated $20,000,000 to purchase existing stockpiles and the Treasury procured them and regulated disposition. The Navy abandoned hope of breaking the Union blockade and threw its resources into eluding it. The plan was an almost immediate success. Ships began getting through the blockade in increasing numbers, Confederate credit gained a marked improvement in Europe, and the needed military stores began flowing in return. Yet, it was too late to save the government. Military reverses made the European gains irrelevant; the monopoly operation had been launched too late to make any difference.

[3]The specific narrative that follows has been excerpted from Dr. Jacob R. Freese's *Secrets of the Late Rebellion*, Philadelphia: Crombargar & Co., 1882. (Further reference to this work will be described as the "narrative.") Freese, a physician, had been an active businessman in New Jersey, and for the four years before the Civil War was editor and proprietor of the *State Gazette*, then one of the state's leading papers. At the outbreak of war, Freese, then 35, was named Assistant Adjutant General to Gen. William R. Montgomery, First New Jersey Regiment of Volunteers. When Montgomery was named Military Governor of Alexandria, Virginia, Freese was appointed Provost Judge. His harsh manner of imposing military law on the town's inhabitants, dealing with disloyal persons (disloyal to the Union, that is) and authorizing seizure of southern goods to pay debts due northern firms earned the tribunal the name "Judge Freese's Bayonet Court." After the war, Freese turned to writing, producing close to a dozen books by the time he wrote *Secrets*. In it, he gives specific acknowledgement to Col. Abercrombie as one of the sources.

[4]A directory of the period shows Hanson Weightman residing at No. 174½ Street.

[5]A directory of Washington for the period describes Washington House, formerly known as Gadsby's, located at Third and Pennsylvania Avenue, as a "quiet and fashionable resort, eligibly situated... for business at the Capitol." The same directory lists the proprietor as Mrs. A. F. Beveridge, and shows Ben Beveridge as a former messenger at the Capitol. (Interestingly, an 1858 directory shows a Ralph Abacrombie as resident at 375 Pennsylvania Avenue, in the immediate vicinity of Washington House; the author has been unable to confirm if this is the Ralph Abercrombie who later conducted the network described in this article. Neither building exists today.) The directory also shows one Senator and eleven Representatives as permanent residents of the hotel.

[6]The Baltimore group dining at George Thomas's is listed as: John P. Grundy, Dr. Leslie Buckler, Alexander Gibson, James Wilson, J. W. Jenkins, Abercrombie, and Weightman. Absent, but according to Freese, also a member of the Baltimore group, was Gilmore Meredith, the minor investor who made "a million of money." Thomas, Grundy, and Gibson were addresses of the Jefferson Davis letters.

[7]The Philadelphia group dining at Dr. Howell's is listed as: C. C. Pollard, George J. Platt, Phillip Swift, George H. Mason, Jacob Florence, Allen McLane, Lamb, Waddell, Abercrombie, and Weightman. The New York group, according to Dr. Freese, consisted of those named, plus Samuel Harding, Alphonso Lippincott, and Alexander Goldsmith, a broker. McLane, Waddell, Lamb, and Goldsmith were addressees of the Jefferson Davis letters. (Three of the eleven addressees are not identified in the narrative.)

[8]George Washington Riggs was a partner in the Washington Banking firm of Corcoran and Riggs, which took up the loans required by the U.S. government to finance the Mexcian War. In 1854, he bought Corcoran's interest, and continued as Riggs & Co. until his death in 1881. His successors, the Riggs National Bank (since 1896) have noted in their advertising that Mr. Lincoln did his banking there; the narrative reveals that the chief executives of both sides in the conflict had that advantage.

[9]Directories of the period list Thecker's address, the disguise studio, as being 32 Green Street, Georgetown.

[10]Dr. Freese describes it this way: "Great Falls... is neither a town or a village; but consists of a large three-story stone building, used as a hotel for summer visitors, and as a private residence in the winter, and a large store-building, with numerous out-houses, used for transportation purposes – all of which belong to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company; but were at the time rented and the business carried on by Messrs. Garrett and Morse, the former of whom gave especial attention to the store and the latter to the hotel. Both were Marylanders; both sympathized heartily with the Southern cause though nominally 'strong Union men;' Both were under the pay of the Confederacy;

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and both, or as a firm received from the Southern Confederacy, at different times, through the hands of Colonels Abercrombie and Killgore, sums in gold amounting to between six and eight thousand dollars. Both were high-class businessmen of high character, and from their love of the southern cause would doubtless have rendered it all the aid they could had they not received one cent of pay; But such was not the policy of President Davis or his agents. They insisted that all who aided should be paid...."

As construction of the C&O Canal progressed, the company accepted tenants for each lock-house and usually an adjacent farmland. In 1830 it funded the enlargement of the lock-house at Great Falls into a hotel. The first floor housed a barroom, dining room, and ballroom. The second floor was divided into individual and dormitory sleeping rooms, each with its own fireplace. On the third floor was a "honeymoon suite" with an excellent view of the canal. The locktender and his family lived in the south wing of the building. In June 1831 the renovated building was opened as the Crommelin House, named in honor of Dutch investors in the canal. Alcohol consumption at the hotel became a problem, causing the company to close the hotel in 1849 and authorizing the conversion of the ballroom to a general store two years later. In 1858, the hotel was reopened but construction by the Army Corps of Engineers caused severe damage resulting, ironically, in the U.S. government paying $1,200 for restoration of what would soon become a Confederate safe house. An 1862 newspaper boasted that the hotel was "well-supplied with everything, newly-fitted up and handsomely decorated." In 1971, Congress established the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park and the Great Falls Tavern, as it is now called, became the park's main visitor center and museum. Visitors today can see the hotel's exterior much as it was at the time of this narrative, envisioning the guard posted at the front facing the canal and the river, and the back entrance and garden as described by the surreptitious travellers.

[11] The narrative reference to Morse no doubt refers to Issac Rhodes Maus, a prominent figure in the area. (See reference 12 for information regarding Garrett.) No documentation has been located to confirm that the two men were operating the combination hotel and general store at Great Falls during the period mentioned. James P. Corless, in his 1981 typescript. *A Preliminary Historical Study of the Great Falls, Maryland, Community: 1830-1885*, lists the lock and tavern keeper of record during the Civil War as George Washington Case, a prominent figure in the Union Party in the predominantly pro-Southern county of the time. A relationship between Case and Maus might be hinted in the post-war marriage of Maus' son to a member of the Case family.

[12] The narrative refers to Howard A. Garrett who was operating a store at nearby Offutt's Crossroads (present day Potomac, not distant from the Great Falls) in 1865. While documentation has not been located to confirm his business operations at the Hotel during the time given in the narrative, the Montgomery County Historical Society has confirmed that a post-Civil War map shows "Garrett and Maus" doing business there. (For Maus, see reference 11.) Corless notes that Garrett was granted permission to erect a feed store at Great Falls on the "towing path" side of the canal after the Civil War, probably as a branch of his other store, and confirms that Garrett operated at the Great Falls during the prosperous post-war years of the canal.

[13] The members of this ideologically-motivated cotton ring described here are not identical with those involved in the Northern cotton rings mentioned in General Lafayette C. Baker's January 30, 1865, letter to the Chairman of the Committee of Commerce: Thurlow Weed, Ward Lamon, Leonard I. Swett, William P. Dole, D. Randolph Martin, B. F. Camp, Prescott Smith, A. H. Lazare, H. A. Risley, T. C. Durant, Samuel Norris and Simeon Draper. During the Civil War, blockade runners sailed, for example, from London, Liverpool, Nassau, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. The trade was extensive, and one estimate places the cotton cargo of British ships sailing from Wilmington, N.C., alone, during 1863 and 1864 at $66,000,000. The cotton rings could sell the cotton for at least three times what they paid for it, then make sizable profits on the goods sold to the Confederacy with the proceeds.

[14] Abercrombie's sister, Mary, lived with her husband Joseph Saxton at 304 B Street South. A well-known inventor (including specie weighing apparatus, hydrometers, fusible metal seals, an eversharp pen, a fountain pen, and a locomotive differential pulley), Saxton made the clock for the belfry of Independence Hall, Philadelphia. At the time he was serving as Superintendent of Weights and Measures, U.S. Coast Survey.

[15] Coincidentally, a gentleman's way of handling a knife and fork is the reason given, in one version, for the detection of Major John Andre as a British spy during the American Revolution.

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